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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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The answer is yes - I am going to continue to complain about the weather again! It's *%@#!&+^$% snowing again! What was forecast as "a dusting" is, at the moment, about 4 inches of snow. And it was supposed to stop snowing over two hours ago! And just a couple of days ago, I pulled out a couple of my garden catalogs to start considering what I wanted to plant this Spring. I guess it's just not the right time yet - sigh.

So, let's move on to some good news. It seems that ISPs are starting to get the right idea - to fight spam. I wish them the best of luck getting rid of this garbage. And now, AOL has just announced that it's adding tools to its software to allow members to opt out of pop-up ads. As soon as I saw the notice, I dropped everything and selected my settings to ban those bothersome creatures! Web surfing used to be fun, but with all of the annoying "features" on the internet these days, it's not. At least steps are being taken to attempt to bring some of the enjoyment back. Let's hope that the noise generated by the disgruntled web masses continues to create a backlash to the many pests of the internet.

Until next time...

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## AtarICQ 0.156 Is Released

GokMasE has announced:

After a period of intense bug-hunting, there is now a new release of the AtarICQ available. Most noticeably the following fixes and additions have been

made:

* Bug #1 fixed: Buffer overflow (1 byte)
* Bug #2 fixed: A nasty bug caused by a mixup of real and virtual memory blocks (caused memory leaks/data corruption)
* Bug #3 fixed: Memory leak, causing aICQ to waste some RAM every time ataricq.udb was saved to disk

* New shortcut: CTRL+h will tell AVSERVER to view the log file for the active contact (requires "instant history" enabled)
* Introduced a scheme for embedding command codes inside text buffers. As a result of this, it is now possible to use more than one text colour in the text
* Following the above, it is possible to config the colours of message headers in preferences
* aICQ will now detect URLs hidden inside "brackets" like ()[]{}
* Arrow-down key should move cursor to end of line below, even if that is to the left of current cursor position

-In other words, if previous aICQ release introduced stability issues on your setup you should definitely give this one a go!

URL: http://www.ataricq.org

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I know that I haven't done a spectacular job of it, but I've tried to keep national politics out of this column. I really have.

But I'm afraid that I feel one of those "sessions" coming on. No, I'm not going to bore you with my opinions about world events or try to get you to see things my way. Your opinions are your own, and I firmly believe that we're all entitled to our opinions. Everyone should have an equal opportunity to be wrong, as my grandmother used to say.

No, what I want to hammer at you for is this troubling tendency we all seem to have that makes us "polarize". It seems that, in situations like the one we're going to be facing rather soon, either we're all the way to one side, or all the way to the other. That's just human nature, and I can both accept and respect that. What I cannot understand is that we normally end up feeling that "the other side" is either insane, stupid, or evil. In this situation a strong case can be made for any of those properties on either side of the issue.

Is it really necessary to change the name "french fries" to "freedom fries" simply because "the french" have an opinion that's different from mine? Yes, there have been jibes coming from both sides of the atlantic for quite a while, but recently both sides seem to have hardened and become less cognizant of the other's viewpoint.

Despite the fact that the government of France does not agree with the government of The United States, I find it hard to fault them for this one act alone.

You see, every school child in the town I grew up in is told of how, during the Revolutionary War, Lt. General Rochambeau and his troops camped for a while not three miles from my childhood home. Along with

others such as Lafayette, Rochambeau provided much needed manpower and strategy to the ragtag rebels against King George's forces and the Hessian mercenaries. Without their support, I'm not sure that we wouldn't still be "the colonies". A short bicycle ride from my childhood home brings you to a monument to Rochambeau. I went there the other day (no, I did not go by bicycle) to remind myself that the difference of language and culture are not necessarily roadblocks to cooperation and understanding, and also that strong associations still require work and vigilance.

A lot of folk will no doubt bring up both world wars, but I'm not going to get dragged into that argument for two reasons. First, we were allied with France less than we were AGAINST Germany. Second, they needed our help. There was a clear and present danger, and it was really the only moral thing to do. Yes, we paid a high price, but we could not even pretend to be the people and the nation that we are had we not done everything in our power to help.

The Statue of Liberty was, as every American schoolchild knows, a gift from France. American cigarettes, American jeans, etc., are much sought-after in many parts of europe. French wine, French food, French cosmetics, etc. are much sought-after in the United States. We share goals, we share history. It pains me to see the sort of silliness that's going on on both shores of the atlantic.

Okay, ready for the ironic part? It is now France, who helped us free ourselves from British rule, that stands ready to oppose us AND the British if/when the U.N. Security Counsel votes on yet another "Iraq resolution". The only really bad thing we ever did to the French is give them Euro-Disney. <g>

As I mentioned earlier, I have my own opinions on current world events, but I have not stated any of them here. My opinions are my own, and voicing them here would serve no purpose. My purpose is to make you think of things that it's been easier to NOT think about recently. And it's only going to get harder down the road.

Well, let's get on with the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Tony the "atari-man" asks about the Mega STE's display:

"Is there a way to get video on the Mega STE to display on a VGA monitor? A plug in card or something like that?"

Kenneth Medin tells Tony:

"You just need a suitable adaptor to use monochrome 640*400 on a VGA monitor. http://www.1632systems.co.uk/ usually have these in stock but right now when I did a check it said "sold out".

Btw. the web page looks rather bad with strange and unreadable text colour in CAB. Cured by disabling "Use document settings". Also all pages are "Untitled document"..."

Carey Christenson asks about a problem with CAB 2.8's cache:

"Lately, I have noticed that CAB is downloading and

storing nothing to the cache folder but a few bytes of information. So I reinstalled and used a previous CACHE that was burnt to CD. After starting CAB up it went ahead and downloaded Yahoo and proceeded to access the hard drive for 15 seconds or longer. In that CACHE folder was 12 megs of stored files and as I had suspected, after downloading Yahoo it went ahead and deleted the entire cache. Is there any reason why this should happen. I have CAB pointing to the correct folder for the cache. What could be going on here?"

Dennis Vermeire tells Carey:

"This sounds very much like a corrupted cache to me, inside the tools folder of CAB there's a program called "cabccln.tos". Put it in the root directory of CAB and then drag the CACHE.CAB file on to it.

You will loose some cached files but roughly 95% of the files inside the cache will be restored/saved from oblivion...."

Deryck Croker chimes in and offers:

"Perhaps you've exceeded the size of the cache, or that disk partition is too full?"

John Garone adds:

"Just a guess that you've exceeded the max ram (14 meg I assume) or max setting for hard drive cache (not enough room on the hard drive for that CAB setting).

12 meg + boot programs + Yahoo = over 14 meg but Cab on my Falcon will only stop showing pics at that point.

I'd suggest saving and renaming the 12 meg cache and creating another cache folder or set CAB to delete the folder upon quitting so you start fresh the next time."

Carey tells Deryck and John:

"Thanks for the suggestion. But I have stored over 40 or 50 megs in my Hard Drive CACHE before. I set the RAM CACHE to 4 megs and told it to keep 256Kb free. Now CAB is only storing like at most 20 to 40 K and most of the time it is just a few bytes. It almost acts as if every time I access another web-page it deletes everything that it previously had in the CACHE from the folder to load in the new page. I don't remember setting anything up that would do this before. The reason I told you about the 12 meg cache was because I installed that cache to confirm in fact it was deleting the folder when I would load in a new page. And as previously stated after CAB loaded in and it downloaded YAHOO it was accessing the hard drive for over 15 seconds and after Yahoo finished loading I confirmed that it in fact had deleted the 12 meg cache folder I had installed. Anyone have any idea what would cause this to happen?? Is there a setting in CAB or MAGIC+Jinnee??"

Bo Snyder asks:

"Is there anyway of modifying a standard 9 pin serial mouse so that it works like the atari mouse with some homebrew adapter or something? or do I need to buy the ready-made adapter?"

Greg Goodwin tells Bo:

"Using a serial mouse via the serial port is just a matter of plugging it in and running a freely available driver.  What Mario Becroft made is an adapter to plug a serial mouse into the mouse port.  That's a bit tougher.

Alternately, you could use PS/2 mice...

Instructions for making a PS/2 mouse work with an Amiga are here: http://rdc.gfns.net/ps2m/index.html

Then you need to adapt them to work for an Atari, which is fairly simple.  The instructions are here: http://koti.mbnet.fi/archyx/productions/projects/amiga-atari_mouse_adapter/

Or, you could build an Eiffel (http://eiffel.atari.org)."

Ron Pothier asks about broadband on an ST:

"I have just acquired a couple ST computers and was wondering how I can hook one or both of them up to my broadband connection which is being used by 3 PC's on a LAN. If there is a way to do this, I would also like to know where to buy the software for a ST to browse the internet. I hope this is possible, but I have been out of the ST game for a number of years due to illness and don't remember all that I should."

'Mark D' tells Ron:

"http://hardware.atari.org - look under ethernet for atari.  Purchase the EtherNEC and have him ship the ISA card with it as it seems to be picky about which Ne2k card you use.  This is the cheapest - best solution for your particular situation probably."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section  - Are Console Price Cuts Coming?
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   'Halo 2' Will Not Appear in 2003!
                                    Video Game Violence Appeal!
                                    And more!

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# Video Game Industry Asks: Are Price Cuts Coming?

Video game industry executives who had expected another volley in the price war over game consoles this spring are increasingly wondering if an uneasy truce has broken out instead.

That would be bad news for game software makers, many of whom are banking on the three game console manufacturers to cut their prices by $50 this May in a move expected to spur demand.

But cautious comments this week by the head of a major publisher have industry executives asking the question: what happens if game hardware does not get any cheaper?

Nearly every major game publisher, and most industry analysts, were on record before this week assuming that Sony Corp., Microsoft Corp. and Nintendo Co. Ltd. would cut the prices of the PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube, respectively, at the E3 industry trade show in May.

That's what happened last year, when in the space of less than a week before the show Sony and Microsoft went from $299 to $199 and Nintendo went from $199 to $149.

But Bobby Kotick, chief executive of Activision Inc., one of the top three game publishers by revenue, fell out of step with his industry brethren on Tuesday when he said there was every indication Sony was not cutting price.

"All the indications that we have from the folks at Sony are that they don't feel the need," Kotick said at a Bear Stearns investment conference in Florida, referring to an event for partners and retailers that Sony held last week.

Sony essentially echoed that view. "We laid out a very top-line view of what our projections are this year," Molly Smith, a spokeswoman for Sony Computer Entertainment of America, told Reuters in reference to last week's Destination PlayStation partner event. "We stand at $199 right now and we haven't discussed or announced any plans to make any adjustments."

Of the three console makers, Sony, which has a dominant position in the international marketplace, is the only one not offering some kind of discount now.

Microsoft is giving away two Sega Corp. games with the Xbox, and Nintendo is giving away a free game with the GameCube and selling a separate discounted bundle that includes the game "Super Mario Sunshine."

"Price hasn't seemed to have been a terrible barrier to entry for our customer base," Sony's Smith said.

Sony led the way last year with its price cut, followed two days later by Microsoft and five days after that by Nintendo, though Microsoft later

claimed its price cut had been long in the works and the Sony cut was in response to its plans.

"I think the price drops to $179 because I think the cost of production right now is $170," Wedbush Morgan analyst Michael Pachter told Reuters. "I think if the console doesn't move at that price and hit Sony's target the next move is to bundle software."

Nintendo is also on record as saying it sees no immediate need to cut the price of their console this year.

"We believe at $149 with a free game ... that selling GameCube hardware at $149 presents all the value the consumer needs," George Harrison, senior vice president of marketing for Nintendo of America, told Reuters recently.

For the time being, Microsoft is also firm on its Xbox pricing.

"We have not announced a price cut and we have no plans to do that," an Xbox spokeswoman told Reuters.

Kotick's comments about PS2 pricing came just hours after Warren Jenson, chief financial officer of industry leader Electronic Arts Inc., said at the same conference that EA assumed price cuts were still coming in May.

On Wednesday, EA executives said they still expect Sony to sell 9 million to 10 million PS2s this year, with some of that pushed by sales of hit games but the rest from whatever methods Sony sees fit.

"Whether they do the rest with pricing, promotions, or great advertising is really their choice, but we're confident they can do it," EA President John Riccitiello said in a statement.

Brian Farrell, the chief executive of game publisher THQ Inc., told Reuters he still believes Sony will cut their price this year but also said that in the end it does not matter if sales stay strong.

"Any publisher should only care about the number of units Sony's going to sell," Farrell said. "We don't care if they sell their 10 million units at $199, $149 or $99 -- we're indifferent. The price point is not the issue, it's the 10 million units."

## Heavily Anticipated 'Halo 2' Not Coming in 2003

The sequel to "Halo," the most successful game yet for Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox game console, will not come out this year despite speculation to the contrary, the game's developer said on its Web site.

Developers Bungie Studios said "Halo 2" would not be released this year, due to the time constraints of producing the game while also doing versions of the original "Halo" for the PC and Macintosh, according to a note posted Friday on the site.

"We're still not ready to pick a specific release date, but we do want to state for the record that Halo 2 will not ship in 2003," the note said. "This game is a vast undertaking, considerably more complex than any of our previous efforts, and there is just no way to squeeze all of the necessary work into this calendar year."

The original "Halo" came out with the launch of the Xbox in November 2001, and the military action game, featuring the "Master Chief," quickly became the console’s marquee title.

When Microsoft announced a sequel last year, most in the industry assumed it would be out in time for the 2003 holiday season.

Bungie did say it would show some of "Halo 2" at E3, the video game industry’s main trade show, this May in Los Angeles.

## Federal Court Hears Video Game Violence Appeal

The video game industry told a federal appeals court on Wednesday that it has the same rights to free speech as moviemakers and publishers and urged the court to overturn a local government ban on the sale of violent video games to minors.

Appearing before a three-judge panel of the U.S. Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, attorneys for the Interactive Digital Software Association, which represents the video game industry, argued that a lower court ruling upholding St. Louis County’s restrictions on game sales should be overturned as unconstitutional.

Video games, like movies and books, are forms of expression protected under the First Amendment because they feature art, music and performance, IDSA lawyer Deanne Maynard told the court. To support its case, the video game industry trade group submitted scripts from some games to the court to prove the artistic merits of its members’ works.

The legal skirmish, considered an important test case, comes as the $30-billion video game industry moves closer to the mainstream entertainment industry through tie-ups and licensing deals and increasingly sees itself as a partner and sometime rival to Hollywood.

Over the last two years, violent games have been among the best-selling games, led by criminal adventure games "Grand Theft Auto 3" and "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City." Overall, games with a "Mature"-rating accounted for about 13 percent of sales in 2002.

The IDSA’s Maynard argued that the St. Louis ordinance went too far in its goal of protecting children from violence and that the voluntary ratings system already in place was a sufficient safeguard.

"This is burning down the house to roast the pig," she said, adding that the solution, if any, was to "make parents more aware of the ratings system."

Video games released in the United States are rated by the Entertainment Software Ratings Board.

But Michael Shuman, associate county counsel for St. Louis, cited evidence that exposure to violent acts causes children to become violent themselves and said the county’s law was intended to "protect the parents’ choice of what comes into their homes."

Judge William Riley asked Shuman how video games were different from

typical Childrens’ make-believe games like "cops and robbers."

"I bet I killed 50 people a week playing Army as a kid," Riley said.

Shuman responded that unlike those playtime fantasies, video games exposed children to graphic depictions of violence.

He cited the work of Craig Anderson, chairman of the Department of Psychology at Iowa State University who has linked violence in games and real-life behavior.

Last September, a group of 33 other scholars, representing institutions like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and London University, filed a brief with the court challenging that idea.

Questioned by the court about whether or not Anderson’s work was just theory, Shuman said governments should not have to wait for proof that playing violent video games can incite children to commit violent acts.

"The government shouldn’t have to wait to develop a record of harm," he said. "While the First Amendment is important, the county can’t wait for scientists to provide evidence."

The court was expected to make a ruling on the issue some time later this year.

The "Grand Theft Auto" games are published by Take-Two Interactive Software Inc.  Other major publishers represented by the IDSA include Electronic Arts Inc., Activision Inc. and THQ Inc.

## New Games: Action Aplenty, Less Gore

When you think of video games, you probably think of guns, violence, and plenty of gore. But a new wave of games are winning high accolades by offering plenty of action while spilling scarcely a drop of blood.

Of the 20 games honored at the recent Independent Games Festival, not a single title involved handheld rocket launchers, grenade guns, spinfusors, or even plasma rifles.

Only one of the ten finalists even hints at violence in its title. But Teenage Lawnmower isn’t on a par with Doom II: Here, the player has to avoid running over furry woodland creatures like moles and squirrels. If you accidentally hit one, a splash of red spurts out of the mower and the level ends prematurely.

Deemphasizing blood and guts doesn’t translate into passive games, however. The grand prize winner, Wild Earth, turns the player into a wildlife photographer on assignment in the Serengeti desert. It gives a whole new meaning to "first-person shooter," the term coined to describe blast-away games like Unreal Tournament and Quake III.

Presented with a shot list of specific animals, you play by making your way across a spectacular landscape to photograph cheetahs, elephants, zebras, and other African wildlife. Scoring is based on the aesthetic quality of the shot, and how closely you got to the animal.

Another crowd pleaser was Pontifex II, actually the third game in a series that teaches the principles of bridge engineering and construction. The game assigns you to build a particular style of bridge out of specific materials; then it lets you test your success by running a car or a train over your bridge. Beginners can have fun watching their not-ready-for-Amtrak bridge slowly tumble into a canyon under the weight of a steam train.

"It’s kind of geeky, but a lot of people I know are addicted to this game," said one enthusiastic fan who wished to remain anonymous, but rushed up to shake hands with the developers.

Terraformers won the IGF award for best audio design. The game, scheduled to ship at the end of the year, features a unique 3D sound engine designed to permit blind gamers to play the game along with sighted friends. The game lets players navigate and reshape a 3D world.

"There are a lot of blind people who play games," says Jay Leventhal, editor-in-chief of Accessworld, a magazine published by the American Federation for the Blind. "For years, there were no Windows-based accessible games."

But things are changing. Terraformers is only the latest in a series of recent game releases for the blind, though most others are simple, speech-enabled board or card games.

The programmers of Garage Games, another independent developer, could barely keep up with the crowds of people who wanted to play Marble Blast and Orbz. In both, the player controls a spheroid and maneuvers it through a 3D world. In Orbz, several players compete over the Internet to shoot their ball into airborne targets. In Marble Blast, players move their marble along a Rube Goldberg-esque map.

Justin Mette, who leads the team that developed Orbz, says the game evolved into one that shot balls into the air from a planned golf game.

"Another developer and I were playing online, trying to see who could sink the most putts, and we found we were both going after the same holes, getting competitive," he says. "It was a lot more fun just to shoot the balls at targets in the air."

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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JAGFEST UK -- 14/15 June

JAGFEST UK

WHAT

A festival of Atari featuring Jaguar, Lynx and hopefully ST . Here you will

be able to play all the great Jaguar games, link your Lynxes and maybe dabble on your ST's/Falcons. We want to include as many of you as possible.

Do you have a pet project on Atari, then come and show it off, do you want to try Battlesphere on your Jag? The we will have it (maybe even be selling it)

You want to trade/swap some of Jaguar/Lynx or Atari software. Brilliant, this is going to be the place to do it. 16/32 Systems will obviously provide some of the retail but if you've got it come along and do it.

Do you run or are you part of an Atari group, then you should be here!

When
June 14/15 2003

Where
Medway Manor Hotell, Rochester UK

Timetable of Events
To be confirmed by GAZTEE and will be updated as soon as possible. But your input would be appreciated.

Costs
2 Day Attendance Entry will be L20 UK (setup starts Friday Night-dismantle sometime Sunday). This includes snacks and drinks.

Hotel Rooms L30 per Night - sharing twin L55 per Night - single

Want to attend for just a day? Then the cost is L5 (Drinks and snacks extra)

Just let us know what you want

If you want to book, you can use Paypal, Cheque or Credit Cards -- then let Nick Harlow know at nick@1632systems.co.uk

MSN Discussion Group - Join and be a part of the best Atari Show in the UK this year all the latest info plus a complete website to add your views too.

http://groups.msn.com/JagFestUK

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Kansas Eyes Internet Filters at Libraries

A proposal to require that public libraries install computer filters to shield minors from Internet pornography would be costly and ineffective, opponents told a Kansas House committee Tuesday.

The testimony before the state's Federal and State Affairs Committee came one day after proponents spoke for the measure.

Among the supporters was a Topeka woman who said the Topeka-Shawnee County Public Library was not policing its computers and their use by minors.

Robert Banks, the Topeka library's deputy operations director, denied the woman's assertion. He said the library staff monitors the computer activities of children and adults and expels those who violate a posted policy on proper use.

"We have had people arrested in the past and will do so in the future," Banks said.

Some legislators agreed with opponents who said the bill was unnecessary.

"It seems like the only problem - if there is a problem - is in Topeka," said Rep. Todd Novascone, R-Wichita.

Novascone's observation was based on comments from representatives from Wichita, Dodge City, Alma and Pottawatomie County who said their libraries already had either Internet filters or policies on computer use or both.

Rosanne Goble, executive director of the Kansas Library Association, said Internet filters would cost an $150 per computer and would take time and resources away from serving the public.

## Study Says Online Sales-Tax Losses Overstated

U.S. states lost $2.8 billion last year in uncollected Internet sales taxes, much less than previously estimated, according to a study released by a business group on Thursday.

Other studies have confused different types of online transactions and relied on fuzzy numbers to arrive at their figures, the Direct Marketing Association, or DMA, said.

As a result, the amount of potential revenue that cash-strapped states are missing out on has been grossly overstated, report author Peter Johnson said.

"The Internet is not creating a massive leak in state coffers," Johnson, a DMA economist, wrote in the report.

Consequently, Congress should not require online sellers to collect sales taxes, the report said.

Many states worry that their revenues will shrink as residents turn increasingly to the Internet to make purchases.

A 1992 Supreme Court decision prohibits states from collecting taxes on out-of-state retailers unless they have a physical presence in the state. That meant $13.3 billion in lost revenues in 2001, according to a

University of Tennessee study.

Actual losses are probably closer to $2.5 billion for that year, said the DMA, a trade association that represents catalog sellers and other direct marketers and has lobbied Congress to keep Internet sales tax-free.

The DMA report estimates that states will miss out on $4.5 billion in tax revenue in 2011, while the University of Tennessee report estimated that states will lose $54 billion.

While the University of Tennessee study used sales estimates compiled by Forrester Research at the height of the dot-com bubble, the DMA used actual sales figures compiled by the Commerce Department and relied on a more conservative growth estimate, the report said.

The DMA also factored out business-to-business sales made over the Electronic Data Interchange network, or EDI, a decades-old proprietary system used by large businesses to manage orders from suppliers. Users of this system, which still handles most wholesale e-commerce transactions, almost always report and pay taxes on these purchases, the DMA said.

State governments have sought to simplify their sales-tax codes with the hope that Congress will allow them to tax online sales, and some large retailers, including Target Corp. and Wal-Mart Stores Inc., have begun voluntarily collecting taxes on their own.

Commerce Department figures also show that online sales grew 28 percent last year, much faster than the 1.6 percent growth rate reported for all retail sales, according to a coalition of "main street" retailers and real-estate businesses that support taxing online commerce.

The arrangement hurts offline retailers that must collect sales taxes as well as state governments, said Nicole Rowe, a spokeswoman for the E-Fairness Coalition.

"No matter what the amounts are that we’re talking about, it’s an unlevel playing field," Rowe said.

## The Best Spyware Stopper

After years of worrying about viruses and trojans, users have a new nemesis: spyware. This term refers to any program that distributes information from a user’s computer without that user’s knowledge.

To be sure, most of this software is more annoying than harmful. However, as Jamie Garrison, co-owner of Aluria Software, which produces the spyware stopper, put it, "Some spyware can ruin your life. It’s that invasive."

So, what can a user do to avoid the onslaught of underhanded tracking programs?

Garrison said the most pressing issue related to spyware is that people do not take it seriously enough. Part of the problem is awareness. Many people are only now finding out about spyware. "Few users are aware that everything they do on the Net or even while not connected to the Internet can be tracked," Ken Lloyd, lead developer at Aluria, told NewsFactor.

After all, spyware can range from a stealthy program that runs in the background, transmitting your surfing habits to a company for marketing purposes, to keylogging software installed by a spouse to monitor communications.

"Well over 85 percent of people have spyware on their computer," Lloyd said.

Gartner analyst Richard Stiennon told NewsFactor that while antivirus products from companies like McAfee and Symantec can be used to detect spyware, the user is also an important ingredient in stopping spyware. He or she must recognize spyware programs - and know enough to remove them - when they are detected.

Of course, most users do not know much about spyware. Stiennon recommended that users get a desktop firewall program that blocks unwanted outgoing connections. Then, even if spyware is running, it will be unable to connect to a server to transmit information.

One personal firewall, ZoneAlarm, can make sure spyware cannot communicate with the outside world. According to Fred Felman, vice president of marketing at Zone Labs, ZoneAlarm "shuts down Internet connectivity instead of losing control of the system" when an unauthorized application tries to send information from a user's PC. Felman told NewsFactor that ZoneAlarm allows users to specify which programs are allowed to send and receive data over the network. Users even can restrict programs to certain ports or domains.

And in addition to antivirus vendors and personal firewalls, a number of companies like Aluria make spyware detection and removal software.

Even when a person recognizes spyware on his or her computer, removing it may be tricky business. According to Garrison, some spyware manages to "embed" itself into the software Windows uses to provide TCP/IP (Internet networking) services. She said that removing such spyware "actually removes your Internet connection. It's fixable, but it's a real pain."

This makes sense, considering that malware authors are always trying to stay one step ahead of users and spyware stoppers. The latest rash of annoyware consists of programs that send pop-ups to instant messaging programs like MSN Messenger. Even more irritating, many of those pop-ups simply inform users that they are vulnerable to unwanted messages.

And it gets worse: Stiennon said that programs being sold to block this plague of IM pop-ups are scams, too. "Just go into the admin functions in the control panel [and do it yourself]," he said, noting that the program vendors are taking advantage of people who do not know they can turn off the function by themselves.

In fact, according to Garrison, most spyware is installed by users voluntarily, even if they do not know it. She blames free products like Grokster and Kazaa for piggybacking spyware onto users' computers, though she noted that it is all disclosed in the fine print. "Here's the really dirty part of it. Let's say you go out and download a free program. It's almost certainly going to have spyware.... Very rarely does spyware get on your computer without your consent."

So, what is the solution? "Stop using free products... Don't download it if it's free."

Lloyd agreed. "The latest trend for software companies is to give their software away for free. By doing this they bundle ad software within it. They usually tell the customer in the EULA (end user license agreement) ... that some additional ad-tracking software will be installed, but they bury it so deep that the average person has no idea."

In addition, Garrison said, most users have themselves to blame for spam. "They say yes to it in their user agreement."

Felman noted that users also need to be conscious of human engineering. "It's interesting; we talk about the automated way that people do this, [but] there might be a bigger risk in the human factor." Felman mentioned scams that depend on users not paying close attention and providing information to third parties about usernames and passwords. "I got an e-mail from an organization purporting to be Drugstore.com, and it looked a lot like other e-mails I've gotten from Drugstore.com, using images from their server but the text asking for my username and password."

Ultimately, the solution to stopping spyware - and other scame - lies with the user. Spyware removal and detection software can be useful, but the best way to fight it is by making sure it is not installed on your computer in the first place. In the end, as Garrison said, the best spyware-stopper is an informed computer user.

## AOL Offers Web Controls to Block Most Pop-Ups

America Online will let its subscribers block most of the pop-ups and pop-under advertising that barrage Web surfers over the next two weeks as the Internet arm of AOL Time Warner Inc. tries to turn itself around and fights to keep its subscribers from fleeing.

In recent months, AOL's new management has acknowledged some of the missteps made in the last couple years, including the focus on advertising rather than members. The new team is charged with creating new services to offset the slump in ad spending and contraction in AOL's dial-up subscriber base.

It has also been trying to improve its service to give subscribers a reason to stay put, even when they seek faster Web connections by helping combat spam and curtail pop-up ads, among the largest complaints from Web surfers.

Nearly 28 billion pop-ups, which launch a new browser window in front of an existing Web page, were delivered to Internet users last year, according to Nielsen Net Ratings.

AOL said on Wednesday it will roll-out controls for all pop-up ads - even ones from other AOL Time Warner businesses like Time and CNN - that can be accessed by clicking on an icon at the bottom of each browser window as Web surfers cruise the Internet.

"From my perspective this is really focused on putting members first and in control, and we are doing this quickly and are putting a value in the service," said Jeff Kimball, AOL's vice president of product marketing in an interview.

"It puts value in the service," he said. "These controls are not a $20, $30

or $40 program that you have to buy or install."

The controls, free to AOL subscribers using the latest version of the service, will stop the windows - or pop-ups - that appear when Web surfers enter or leave a Web site but will not block user-requested pop-ups that are necessary to do something on the Web such as online banking, Kimball said.

Subscribers will be able to turn the controls on or off.

The effort comes after AOL said last year it would block all third-party pop-up ads but left the door open to show pop-ups for services and products from AOL Time Warner's different businesses.

Kimball said the new controls can also block AOL pop-ups and most of the others that barrage Web surfers. But some ads might still sneak through, Kimball said, adding that there are still ways to trigger pop-ups that bypass this technology.

## Software Firms Launch Weapons in Spam Fight

Faced with increasingly clever assaults by e-mail marketers and other "spammers," software companies are devising new tricks and technologies to combat the onslaught of unwanted online solicitations.

Anti-virus vendor Trend Micro Inc. and Qurb Inc., a new company launched by the founders of software maker AvantGo, unveiled new ways this week to keep spam out of e-mail inboxes.

Qurb's software, priced at $24.95, screens e-mail by creating an "approved sender" list. Trend Micro's software allows corporations to block unwanted e-mail before it gets into the network, for $4 to $30 per user depending on the number of licenses.

Spam - unsolicited e-mail touting everything from Viagra to porn to get-rich-quick schemes - touches everyone with an e-mail address. The amount of spam doubled in the past two years to an estimated 7.3 billion messages worldwide sent daily, said Mark Levitt, a research vice president at market research firm International Data Corp.

There are a number of other anti-spam software and services currently on the market, but many users complain spam still gets through.

Gartner Group estimates nearly half of all e-mail received by companies is junk mail. Ferris Research put the total cost of combating it at $8.9 billion last year, according to Trend Micro.

"Some people in our company get 200 e-mail messages a day that are just pure spam," said Eric Mann, vice president of marketing at Talkway.com, a Mountain View, California, start-up that enables people to add video and voice to e-mail.

"I had information sitting in my in-box for two days that I didn't know about," Mann said. "We had some investment folks sending us information, and they sent it and I had not caught it, and quite frankly, I looked very dumb."

Mann has been using Qurb’s software for several weeks and said it is like having an assistant hand-sort his e-mail for him. "It’s letting me get the right stuff and protecting me from the wrong stuff."

The software is the latest brainchild of the founders of AvantGo, the mobile software maker that was recently acquired by Sybase Inc. San Mateo, California-based Qurb developed the first version of its software for users of Microsoft Corp.’s Outlook e-mail program.

Once installed, it creates a list based on existing e-mails in the user’s address book, said Qurb co-founder Linus Upson. For all new incoming e-mail that is not in that list, the software automatically forwards a reply asking the sender to respond in order to be added to the list. Spammers never respond because it is not cost effective, he said.

Users can also specify if they don’t want to receive e-mail from a particular person or e-mail address. Any e-mail that is not on the list is saved in a special folder for a specified period of time in case users want to double check that they are not missing any e-mail they want.

For anti-virus providers, offering anti-spam protection is a natural extension since their software is already looking for nasty types of e-mail to block. Symantec Corp. and Network Associates Inc. offer software that looks at keywords and context of e-mail to block spam.

For its anti-spam offering, Tokyo-based Trend Micro has partnered with anti-spam services provider Postini in Redwood City, California. Similar to anti-virus software, the software compares incoming e-mail with a database of spam samples and blocks any that match, said Kevin Murray, a senior product marketing manager at Trend Micro.

Network administrators can control the settings, for example, tagging suspect e-mail as "SPAM" in the subject line or rerouting it to a special file for closer scrutiny, he said.

Spammers are getting corporate e-mail addresses by grabbing them off Web sites or in so-called "direct harvest attacks," sending so many repeat e-mails with random names that the corporate e-mail Web server eventually spits out the list, said Doug McLean, marketing vice president at Postini.

Spammers, already clever at modifying subject lines to get past spam blockers, also are contriving unique ways to fake the origination information so it looks like it comes from legitimate sources.

They can fake the address header to send e-mail that comes from a friend and, if they can trick users into downloading software, get at e-mail addresses inside a victim’s computer.

To avoid being put on black-lists, spammers change addresses often. For instance, they "rent" time on different ISP networks, Qurb’s Upson said. "They hook up to the network, send millions of spams, unplug and drive away."

While Qurb, Trend Micro and others are selling anti-spam software, some states are enacting laws to make spam a crime. A new bill introduced in California last month would allow recipients to sue spammers for $500 per violation.

# Judge Dismisses E-Mail Case Vs. Sprint

The first court test of Utah's 10-month-old law against "spam" e-mail ended with a judge's dismissal of a proposed class action lawsuit against Sprint Communications Co.

The suit was filed in state court last July by South Salt Lake resident Terry Gillman, who accused Sprint of violating the Unsolicited E-Mail Act by sending him advertising.

Third District Judge Denise Lindberg found that Gillman had given his permission to receive third-party promotional messages when he signed on to the Audio Galaxy Web site in April. That site sold e-mail addresses to other parties, among them Sprint.

"At least in cases similar to this one, this ruling has a great deal of importance," Sprint attorney Paul Drecksel said Thursday. "This is the first time a court in Utah has been called upon to qualify what amounts to unsolicited e-mail."

Drecksel said the decision also was important in light of the more than 30 states with often conflicting anti-spam e-mail laws. Because spam can come from widely scattered locations, determining which of the varying standards applies can be a legal nightmare.

"The purported purpose of all these statutes is mainly to stop unsolicited pornography and scams," Drecksel said. "But what we find in practice is that these laws do nothing to stop those two bad acts. Those companies are here today, gone tomorrow, so lawyers can't make any money pursuing them."

He said that instead, "legitimate companies with deep pockets" end up in court.

Attorney Denver Snuffer, whose firm filed Gillman's complaint, did not immediately answer telephone and e-mail messages seeking comment. Gillman, whose phone is unlisted, also could not be reached.

However, the sponsor of the state's anti-spam statute, Sen. Patrice Arent, D-Holladay, said that civil suits remain the best way to enforce the law's provision for fines of $10 per unwanted e-mail up to a maximum of $25,000 per day.

The Gillman case "does not sound like it was really a good test of the statute," Arent said. "Clearly, the statute is intended to protect people against unsolicited commercial and sexually explicit e-mails - not preventing e-mail from companies with pre-existing relationships" with recipients. "You still need to be careful and cautious about what you sign up for online."

Gillman requested removal on May 14, 2002, from the e-mailing lists his visit to Audio Galaxy a month earlier had linked him to. Two days later, he received a Sprint ad, and on May 28 he filed suit. The court found his attempt to have himself removed from the lists was insufficient to void the pre-existing business relationship.

Arent said her bill could use some fine-tuning, included providing e-mailers reasonable time to comply with requests for removal.

## Yahoo Sharpens Spam-Fighting Weapons

Users of Yahoo’s e-mail service can expect to see even less spam cluttering their inboxes, the company said, now that it has bolstered its proprietary SpamGuard filter.

The enhancements to SpamGuard, due to be announced Tuesday, come as part of an ongoing effort from the Web content and e-mail provider to eliminate the deluge of unsolicited commercial e-mail flooding Internet users, according to Lisa Pollock, director of Yahoo’s messaging products.

"Spam has become an ever-increasing issue for us and the industry," Pollock said.

Yahoo originally developed its SpamGuard filter in December of 1999, according to Pollock, and it has since been adding to its arsenal of spam-fighting tools. In August of last year, for example, the company added a "this is spam" link to users’ inboxes.

The latest improvements to its SpamGuard have resulted in a 40 percent decrease in complaints coming through the "this is spam link" in a limited test of users, according to Pollock.

"The user experience will be the same, but they will notice that SpamGuard will work better and be more effective at getting messages where they want them to be," Pollock said.

She declined to elaborate on exactly what changes were made to SpamGuard, however, saying that it is proprietary information and could help spammers.

Yahoo’s move comes on the heels of a slew of announcements by ISPs indicating that the industry is taking a tough stance on spam. America Online, for example, announced last week that it had blocked 1 billion spam e-mails from user inboxes in one day.

Microsoft has also moved to make spam fighting a central feature of its latest Internet access software, MSN 8.

Pollock said that the fact that the industry as a whole is focused on canning spam is a positive development.

"Together we will absolutely continue to improve the way users interact with e-mail," she said.

## Computer Worm Linked to India-Pakistan Cyber-Spat

Hackers claiming to be from India have launched their latest strike in a cyber-spat with Pakistan by unleashing a new variant of the "Yaha" Internet e-mail worm, anti-virus firm Sophos Inc. said on Wednesday.

The worm, written by a group calling itself the Indian Snakes, does not appear to be spreading or causing any damage, said Chris Wraight, a technical consultant at U.K.-based Sophos.

The Yaha-Q worm, the latest in a string of Yaha worms released by hackers

from both countries since December, leaves a back-door on an infected machine and sends itself to people listed in the e-mail address book, Wraight said.

It also tries to disable anti-virus software and commands the computer to launch a denial-of-service attack on five Pakistani Web sites, he said. Such an attack is designed to shut down a Web site by sending so many repeat requests to the Web server that it becomes overloaded.

The Pakistan Web sites it tries to attack are those of the main government Web site, the government's Computer Bureau, a community "portal" site, Internet service provider Comsats and the Karachi Stock Exchange, according to Sophos.

Yaha-Q arrives in an e-mail attachment but also can spread via shared network drives, such as at corporations. It tries to sneak past firewalls and other security software to get onto Web servers directly, Wraight said.

In addition to storing taunting messages against Pakistan on the computer, it sends messages to Roger Thompson, technical director of malicious code research at TruSecure Corp. in Herndon, Virginia, and to a female virus writer known as "Gigabyte," Sophos said.

Gigabyte wrote a virus in January to counter an earlier version of Yaha that was designed to attack her Web site.

"I do not plan on writing a new 'counter attack' or getting further involved with these people in any way," she wrote in an e-mail.

Thompson said he has commented in the past that previous versions of Yaha were politically motivated.

The worm is not spreading because it is being blocked by anti-virus and other security software, and people are becoming more suspicious of e-mail and not clicking on mysterious attachments, Wraight said.

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